

Chair's Annual Report March 2023

**Maria Trevis, Chair of the Victoria Park Community Group,
Reading, Berkshire**



Introduction

Its official! We've been constituted for one whole year. The committee this year consisted of: **Trustee & Chair - Maria Trevis, Trustee & treasurer - Mara Campbell, Trustee & secretary - Quinten Taylor.**

Of course, we could not have achieved this without the support our amazing volunteers from the community who have helped on a range of projects from tree watering and litter picking to bulb planting and our jubilee event. We look forward to the volunteer pool growing over the next year as we begin to raise our profile more in the area.

Despite being in our early stages the group has achieved some successes in meeting the group's constitutional aims, which are to:

- **Bring residents together for activities that conserve, protect or improve the character of the area.**
- **Bring residents together for activities that reduce isolation and build community spirit.**

Key Successes this year include:

June 2022 – Jubilee Picnic in the Park - over 150 people attended for a family 'picnic in the park'. Our Event was well supported by Lifespring Church. A big thank you to Jackie Jackson and her team who offered free scones, jam, ice cream, drinks and snacks to park visitors, and Sarah, the church's youth lead who facilitated some fun children's games. From parachute games and egg and spoon, to tug of war, the children had an enjoyable time. The focus point of our stall provided awareness of our group, craft activities, children's book swap and lots of opportunities to be introduced to our neighbours. The highlight for many was also the appearance of a fire engine from the Reading Fire Brigade.

School summer holiday – As a legacy of the children's games at our jubilee event, the Lifespring Church team were inspired to organise a weekly stay and play at the park with free lollies and games for kids during the summer holidays. According to estimates, there were approx. 50 parents and children engaged at every session.

July to Sept 22 – tree watering team of volunteers to support Reading Climate Action – our community group provided a team of volunteers to regularly water the new trees in our Victoria park to help them survive the summer drought. Only two trees failed to make it and were replaced in winter 2022.

Community litter picks

We've run two litter picks this year and hope to do more in the coming year. At every pick so far we've grown in number. It is a good opportunity to meet and talk to others in the community and get to know like-minded people in the area. Our aim is to have enough people to cover the whole of the neighbourhood in one session.

Bulb Planting

In late 2021 before we constituted, a small volunteer group dug up, tidied and planted bulbs in the 4 large planters in the area. Two positioned at the end of George Street, the other two bridging Caroline Street and Weldale Street.

In 2022, we were given bags of bulbs and compost by Tricia Marcouse as part of Econet's funding to increase the bulbs in our planters. Further volunteers from the group supported Econet with extra bulb planting in the park. Our group has also connected Tricia from Econet with Civitas Academy and they are now working

together on further projects to improve the ecology of the park whilst increasing the childrens' awareness of nature and wildlife in the area.

Establishing connections

As a group we are beginning to establish regular connections and communication with local organisations, becoming regular points of contact for our town councillors, Thames Valley PCSO's, Lifespring Church, local school (Civitas), and Reading Borough Council.

Challenges for the VPCG

- One of the biggest challenges we face at this time is communicating with people in the community. Our efforts so far have included 2 printed newsletters distributed to every household (except the blocks of flats), the setting up of a Google Group, website, Facebook and Nextdoor groups. The aim of our event in the park was also to raise awareness of what we do. During the tree watering campaign I also included our details on the trees so people would know what we were doing.
- We want to engage with more interested members of the community – particularly those in the increasing number of high-rise flats being built in the area.
- Another challenge, is making the running of our group sustainable, both from a resource and human resource perspective. We are all busy people, but many hands make light work. The more people willing to be part of the committee the better. We have some very loyal volunteers who turn up, but we could do with more people being an active part of our committee. We encourage more of you to join us as committee members even if you don't want to be a trustee.
- We need to keep costs to a minimum and make income sustainable to cover our insurance and running costs.

Fundraising and plans for 2023/24

This year in my role as chair I have achieved success in fundraising a sum of money to support our plans for 2023. The money raised will go towards running our group (public liability insurance, printing costs, website hosting, plus items listed below). We have raised enough money for a number of activities and measures this year. A big thank you to the following funders for grants to our group:

- **Reading Borough Council (small grants scheme)** – money for this arrived after the close of our financial year but is a substantial amount towards the events and plans below
- **Reading Lions Club**
- **Rotary Club Reading.**

Funded items and activities in 2023

Community Noticeboard: Funds to install a noticeboard situated at the George Street end of the park.

Coronation event: money to cover insurance and resources needed to hold a community event on Sunday 7th May. Similar to last year it will be a picnic in the park to mark the King's coronation but we are encouraging a few more stallholders to provide more positive activities for visitors to the park.

Big Clean Up event: funds to cover a big clean up event to remove bulky waste from people's front yards through a legitimate council supplier.

Printed newsletters: we want to send out more printed newsletters and now have some funds to cover the printing of these for 2023.

I am a firm believer in great things happening when good people do things. It is so important to keep the momentum going with this group to ensure a stronger and more connected community in what can sometimes feel like a disconnected and dis-functional society. On behalf of the trustees I would like to thank all our active volunteers for their time and efforts this year. I would also like to thank all stakeholders who have supported our progress so far. Long may our group continue. Please spread the word about our group and get involved, talk to us, be an active part of growing our positive community spirit.

Maria Trevis, Chair of the Victoria Park Community Group.